



Draft Opening Statement ECOSOC Vice President

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Africa Regional Preparatory Meeting

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Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning — and welcome to this ECOSOC Regional Preparatory Meeting for Africa.

At the outset, I thank our hosts, the Government of Ethiopia, for their generous hospitality, as well as the delightful people of the city of Addis Ababa for such a warm welcome. I also heartily thank our partners, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) for their support in convening this important dialogue. I especially thank YOU — honourable Ministers and other distinguished delegates — for making the journey to attend and taking the time to participate in spite of your busy schedules.

Ladies and Gentlemen, why are we here?

Our talks will centre on a very specific topic: the role small and medium-sized enterprises play in driving productive capacity, growth and job creation in Africa. This

focus on productivity, growth and employment could not be more important — without them, our goals of raising living standards and creating more and better opportunities for our people, especially our youth, is surely unattainable.

Encouragingly, here in Africa there is much to celebrate... because evidence points to a continent on the move...

A continent witnessing transformative economic growth rates, showing noticeable commercial vibrancy, and offering tremendous opportunities in the horizon.

A continent more integrated in the world economy through partnerships more diverse than ever before.

Over the past decade, six of the world's ten fastest-growing countries were African. In eight of those past 10 years, Africa as a whole grew faster than even East Asia. And despite a slowdown among rich economies this year, Africa is expected to continue to grow by at least 5% in 2012, again similar to Asia.

Banking, retailing, telecommunications and construction are booming. Private investment inflows are also on the rise. The Annual flow of foreign direct investment to the continent increased from 9 billion US dollars in 2000 to more than 65 billion in 2008.

In the last ten years GNI per capita growth in Sub-Saharan Africa reached around 60%, compared to only 17% in the previous decade.

This is just a snapshot of Africa's recent achievements ... but it tells a story of undeniable success.

Still, of course, there is also plenty to fret about.

Despite the emergence of a new middle class, for many Africans living below the poverty line — the majority of the continent's one billion people — disease and hunger remain a major challenge. Economic growth is clearly trickling down, but not fast enough. Progress towards the other Millennium Development Goals, likewise, has been

slow and uneven. Take child mortality: for every 1,000 children, 118 will die before their fifth birthday. Two decades ago, the figure was 165, not much higher.

Clearly, our work remains anything but finished. Scaling-up progress will also require far more — and far better — international coordination. The United Nations is a good place to start.

As Vice-President of the UN Economic and Social Council proudly representing Africa, I would like to briefly tell you something about the Council's role in this regard and how today's meeting will feed into the Council's work.

For over 60 years, ECOSOC has served as the principle global forum where nations assemble to collectively address global development challenges. Its strength has always been its broad representation — a place for countries large and small alike to voice their concerns and seek solutions to common problems. Since 2007, ECOSOC's substantive session has featured the Annual Ministerial Review, and the Development Cooperation Forum - held every two years, drawing high-level policymakers from government and others to discuss a specific global challenge and review progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. This year, the issue being considered is productive capacity, employment and decent work and inclusive growth.

A topic of vital importance tackled at a timely moment. It is not a secret that the uprisings and revolutions the North of this continent witnessed last year, including in my own country Egypt, were triggered not only by a yearning for more freedom and democracy but also by a longing for more and better jobs, stronger economic inclusion and social justice. These developments further accentuate the significance of this year's AMR.

The 2012 AMR will be divided into three main elements:

First, National Voluntary Presentations, where nine developed and developing countries will offer case studies and lessons-learned from their recent development experiences.

Secondly, Country-led Regional Consultations, which offer a broader look at the latest employment trends in each region.

Thirdly, a Global Review, based on a comprehensive report by the United Nations Secretary-General, with recommendations on ways to accelerate progress on productive capacity and decent jobs.

A global meeting of this magnitude demands big preparations. As such, the analysis and insights which emerge from today's important regional meeting will definitely help ensure that global policy-makers are better aware of Africa's priorities when you meet them in July.

When I move, in a few weeks time, to the UN side of the fence, to assume my new responsibilities as Special Adviser of the United Nations Secretary General on Africa, I will strive to continue to advance these priorities and defend, with your support, the continent's interests, so that together we can unleash Africa's tremendous potential.

I should add as well that this June, the UN will hold its "Rio+20" Conference on Sustainable Development. Like the AMR, Rio+20 is especially timely.

In 2012, mobilizing international support for sustainable development in its three pillars could hardly be more urgent. As Africa's Vice Chair in the Rio +20 Preparatory Committee, I am well aware of the many acute challenges our continent faces on the road to sustainable development.

Increasingly, then, ECOSOC needs to become *the* destination for governments to discuss and solve, not only global economic problems, but also social and environmental ones. Building stronger partnerships with the private sector, civil society, the academia, philanthropic organizations and other stakeholders, can only but reinforce ECOSOC's role in tackling these interlinked issues. Rio+20 presents a major chance to sharpen the Council's focus and further integrate these three pillars – economic, social and environmental.

Finally, let me return to the business at hand.

Today, Session 1 will examine the optimal business and regulatory climate needed to allow small and mid-sized firms to thrive. What, for example, could be done to increase access to financing for innovative and potentially high-growth SMEs in the region?

Session 2 will set its sights on the specific job-creation and productivity strengths of such firms. How might we better promote entrepreneurship and reduce barriers to SME

development among women, young people and other marginalized groups in the region?

Session 3 will offer case studies from across the region. What has worked? What has not?

Lastly, Session 4 will look ahead — selecting and articulating key policy messages for July's AMR. How do we craft and promote such messages for maximum effect?

This, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, is a rare opportunity for us to connect our individual national efforts towards development, with the regional and global agendas. Africa has much to tell about its development progress while taking stock of its continuing support needs.

I thank you.